

KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND

NEW YORK  
SENATOR

RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING  
SUITE 478  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205  
202-224-4451

COMMITTEES:  
ARMED SERVICES  
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS  
AGRICULTURE  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

July 17, 2014

The Honorable Gina McCarthy  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Office of the Administrator, 1101A  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator McCarthy:

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) program, which supplements agency base budgets that fund Great Lakes cleanup actions, has leveraged federal resources to fund more than 2,000 projects to improve water quality, protect and restore native habitat and species, and prevent and control invasive species in the Great Lakes region. The initial GLRI Action Plan (FY10-14) has been the roadmap for successful federal agency coordination to target the most pressing environmental issues threatening the Great Lakes. On May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014 the GLRI Interagency Task Force released a draft of the GLRI Action Plan II (FY15-19) for public input. I am writing to urge the Task Force to include microplastics and specifically microbeads from personal care products (PCPs) to the list of emerging contaminants in the latest GLRI Action Plan.

Plastics can persist in the environment for hundreds of years and are found in all of the world's oceans. A 2012 survey of the Great Lakes found high concentrations of microplastics, including microbeads, in Lake Superior and Lake Huron with the highest concentrations in Lake Erie. Microplastics will attract pollutants like PCBs, DDT and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) already in the environment and concentrate them to dangerous levels. Fish and birds mistake microplastics for food and ingest them, causing internal blockages and dehydration. This will also expose these animals to the high concentrations of toxins bound to the microplastics.

Because microbeads are approved for use in PCPs like body wash, hand cleanser, and toothpaste they can be disposed of into the municipal sewer system. Microbeads cannot be captured by most sewer treatment facilities and as a result are discharged directly to water bodies like the Great Lakes where they are accumulating. Explicitly identifying microplastics and microbeads as an emerging contaminant in the GLRI Action Plan II will ensure this critical issue receives the attention it deserves.

Thank you for all of your hard work to make the restoration and protection of the Great Lakes region a priority. Should you or your staff wish to further discuss this issue please contact Jordan Baugh, of my staff, at 202-224-2251 or [Jordan\\_baugh@gillibrand.senate.gov](mailto:Jordan_baugh@gillibrand.senate.gov).

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator